

# On The Development of the Impartiality Maxim in German Journalism

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The first issue of the *Wienerisches Diarium* – later known as the *Wiener Zeitung* – hailed in a style of reporting that would concentrate on “the substance of all the latest, most remarkable and true news of the world received by this editorial office in writing, without oratorical or poetic elaborations, or prejudices, conveying nothing but the truth in accordance with the reports received.”<sup>1</sup>

At first sight the above announcement may not strike the reader as out of the ordinary. Yet from today's point of view, and paying tribute to the venue of Vienna<sup>2</sup>, it is a most suitable, albeit unusual introduction to the chosen topic. Announcements like it were typical of and widely used in early journalism. And there is more to them than meets the eye. In fact, they all bear within them one of the most central issues of journalism in general, which is the idea of impartiality. They even reveal some of the rules of conduct established to that end, announcing as they do a kind of reporting which is to the point and free from prejudice in accordance with the principle of “relata refero”.<sup>3</sup>

This is interesting inasmuch as it is frequently said that up until the Second World War there was virtually no journalistic impartiality in Ger-

many or rather in German-language printed media. Wolfgang Donsbach wrote in 1992:

*The press in Germany tended to be conditioned by party policy until well into this century, in fact until after the Second World War. The majority of newspapers in the Weimar Republic were conditioned by party politics or by philosophical institutions.*<sup>4</sup>

The latter is known to be true, however, on closer inspection of the history of journalism it is hardly reasonable to deduct from it the theory that in Germany there “never was a tradition according to which journalism was committed to or had to commit itself to objectivity and neutrality.”<sup>5</sup> Donsbach continues by saying that:

*in the USA, this commitment between the press and interest groups began to disintegrate in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, more than 100 years before it did in Germany.*<sup>6</sup>

In actual fact, Germany or rather German-language printed media have a much longer tradition of journalism to look back on; it can be traced to the time the first periodical papers were published in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, some of its roots reaching back as far as the antecedents of these

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<sup>1</sup> Emil Löbl: *Kultur und Presse*, Leipzig 1903, 50.

<sup>2</sup> extended version of a paper presented at the symposium on 55 years of *Austrian Press Agency* which was to be held in Vienna on September 18, 2001 but which because of the terrorist attacks in the USA has been postponed until May 13, 2002.

<sup>3</sup> According to this principle news are to be relayed as they are received. I shall refer to this below. The principle is closely linked to another rule of reporting which is that of references. Kaspar Stieler, in one of the earliest known commentaries on newspapers, discusses these rules at great length, see also Kaspar Stieler: *Zeitungs Lust und Nutz*. Complete reprint of the original edition of 1695. Gert Hagelwicke (ed.) Bremen 1969, pages 57 and 27, see also Philomen Schönhagen: *Unparteilichkeit im Journalismus. Tradition einer Qualitätsnorm*. Tübingen 1998; Jörg Jochen Berns: *Parteilichkeit und Zeitungswesen. Zur Rekonstruktion einer medienpolitischen Diskussion an der*

*Wende vom 17. zum 18. Jahrhundert*. In: Wolfgang F. Haug (ed): *Massen, Medien, Politik*. Karlsruhe 1976, 202-203. Emil Löbl points out that the *Wienerisches Diarium* / the *Wiener Zeitung* maintained these principles for a long time (see also *Kultur und Presse*, 50).

<sup>4</sup> Wolfgang Donsbach: *Instrumente der Qualitätsmessung – Internationale Entwicklung*. In: *Pressefreiheit, Pressewahrheit. Kritik und Selbstkritik im Journalismus*. Dokumentation zu den 7. Erlanger Medientagen am 9./10. Mai 1992. Verein Bürger fragen Journalisten e.V. (Hg.). Erlangen 1992, 43-68, hier 65.

<sup>5</sup> Wolfgang Donsbach: *Das Verhältnis von Journalismus und Politik im internationalen Vergleich*. In: *Medien in Europa. Angst als publizistische Strategie?* Dokumentation zu den 8. Erlanger Medientagen am 1./2. Mai 1993. Verein Bürger fragen Journalisten e.V. (Hg.). Erlangen 1993, 67-82, hier 70.

<sup>6</sup> Donsbach, *Instrumente der Qualitätsmessung*, 65.

papers. Besides, contrary to the above quoted and widely diffused conception,<sup>7</sup> the principle of impartiality in American journalism can be traced back to well before the 19<sup>th</sup> century, i.e. to the first colonial papers of the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In Germany, there is proof that the concept of impartiality existed for several centuries in a row, particularly with local papers.

Due to lack of space, the following cannot claim to be more than a rough sketch of this tradition of journalistic impartiality, with very few examples to support this theory. However, all of it is based on a full analysis of early journalism and local press, particularly that of the late 18<sup>th</sup> and the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>8</sup>

## 1. Impartiality in German-language Journalism in the Early Days

The term impartiality in the context of periodical papers<sup>9</sup> is first expressly used for the title of two weekly papers in 1623. One was the Zurich paper *Neue Unpartheysche Zeitung und Relation/Auß allerhand glaubwürdigen Sendbriefen ....*<sup>10</sup> and the other was the *Wochenliche / ungefelschte Neue Zeitung / Und Relation / ...* which

was probably also published in Zurich.<sup>11</sup> A later issue of the latter of that same year also carried the title *Neue Unpartheysche Zeitung und Relation*, and another version yet bears the expression "ohne einichen affeckt"<sup>12</sup>, referring to its impartial reporting style in a way similar to that of the *Wiener Diarium* mentioned above.

As early as 1621, a weekly paper was published in Frankfurt which bore the interesting title: *unaltered, continuous paper on news which are received ordinarily, sent in by correspondents and divulged without a trace of passion...*<sup>13</sup> Incoming news were to be disseminated without passion, that is, free from passionate sympathy, independent from personal attitudes or convictions, neutral in other words<sup>14</sup>. The term *unvergeiflich* refers to the same concept: "...impartial, without the right to anticipate the judgement of others" or "the opinions of others."<sup>15</sup> A newspaper published in Oetting in 1625 assured its readers that all its news was printed "truthfully and impartially."<sup>16</sup>

The *Sonntägliche Zeitung* in its title of 1688 substantiates its support of neutral reporting by saying that "everyone should be satisfied as far as possible"<sup>17</sup>, meaning that all readers had to be

satisfied in their diverse needs for information and orientation. The latter is best achieved by being neutral. The *Hamburger* or *Hollsteinische unpartheyische Correspondent*, a highly successful and widely read paper of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, in its first issue of June 22, 1712, uses similar words to justify a programme of impartial reporting.<sup>18</sup> Martin Welke writes that the editors of that paper,

following the principle of 'audiatur et altera pars' ... [published] comments without regard to their origin, statements by the parties in power are printed alongside those of the opposition (...) Consciously holding back its own opinion the 'Correspondent' places controversial political views alongside each other so that everyone can form their own opinion.<sup>19</sup>

All of the above are typical references to and programmatic announcements of the journalist profession of the early days,<sup>20</sup> as found in many titles and introductory remarks to papers in the 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The list of examples is endless. Early writers, such as Kaspar Stieler, in their essays on journalism also gave careful consideration to the aspect of impartiality and the principles advocated in the titles of newspapers, e.g. research into and transparency of literary sources, unprejudiced reporting, "relata refero" and "audiatur et altera pars".<sup>21</sup> Relevant literature has many examples to prove that journalists were not simply paying lip service to these pro-

grammes but rather were practicing impartial reporting on a daily basis. This was not only the case with the first two known weekly papers of the 17<sup>th</sup> century but as Thomas Schröder writes,<sup>22</sup> quite apparently so with numerous papers of the 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries too.<sup>23</sup> The best-known example in this context is probably Johann Friedrich Cottas' *Allgemeine Zeitung* first published in 1798. Thus, contrary to Donsbach's theory quoted above it has to be said that impartiality was quite evidently a central principle of early journalism in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>24</sup> But what exactly did individual newspapermen, in other words the editors, understand by this principle?

## 2. The Traditional Concept of Journalist Impartiality

The above mentioned introductory remarks were written by editors and publishers, who not infrequently were one and the same person, and were published in first editions, New Year's editions, epilogues, editorials, and others more.<sup>25</sup> They are considered their own personal statements and constitute valuable sources for reconstructing the views of those who practiced journalist impartiality at the time. A comprehensive analysis of more than 1,000 German-language papers from three centuries shows that the concept of impartiality in practice relied on four central rules which are briefly outlined below:

<sup>7</sup> For most American literature the beginnings of objective and impartial journalism also date back to the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, see also Michael Schudson: *Origins of the ideal of objectivity in the professions. Studies in the history of American journalism and American law, 1830-1940*. New York; London 1990, 47, as well as David T.Z. Mindich: *Just the facts. How "objectivity" came to define American journalism*. New York; London 1998, 100 ff. for an extensive description and further references see also Schönhagen, *Unparteilichkeit im Journalismus*, 56.

<sup>8</sup> The findings on early journalism are based primarily on extensive studies of literature, those on local journalism of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries are also based on the author's own analysis of more than 1,500 newspaper editions carried out for the doctorate thesis, see Schönhagen, *Unparteilichkeit im Journalismus*, 13 and 144.

<sup>9</sup> The claim for impartiality of the so-called mass relations, the antecedents of weekly papers, is first found in 1599 in titles and editors' declarations. The title of a mass relation published in Straßburg in 1590 was "Unpostreuterische / Das ist / Unpartheyische Geschicht Schrifften" (impartial historical writings) (quoted from Klaus Bender: *Eine unbekannte Meßrelation. Die Unpostreuterischen Geschicht-Schrifften des Thobias Steger, Straßburg 1590*. In: *Wolfenbütteler Notizen zur Buchgeschichte* 2/1981.

However, impartiality at the time had a meaning distinct from that of later weekly papers. The mass relations considered themselves as chronicles, seeking objective historiography which was not the same as impartial reporting on current news. Impartiality as understood by the editors of these early relations included some of the aspects which later on characterized journalistic standards.

See also Schönhagen, *Unparteilichkeit im Journalismus*, 20 ff.

<sup>10</sup> see Else Bogel/Elger Blühm: *Die deutschen Zeitungen des 17. Jahrhunderts. Ein Bestandsverzeichnis mit historischen und bibliographischen Angaben*. Bremen 1971, Bd. 1, 55, Bd. 2, 57 as well as Hans Bodmer: *Die älteste Zürcher Zeitung*. In: *Zürcher Taschenbuch auf das Jahr 1891*. Gesellschaft Zürcherischer Geschichtsfreunde (Hg.). Zürich 1891 (14. Jg.), 175-216.

<sup>11</sup> see Bogel/Blühm, *Die deutschen Zeitungen des 17. Jahrhunderts*, Bd. 1, 53.

<sup>12</sup> see Bogel/Blühm, *Die deutschen Zeitungen des 17. Jahrhunderts*, 53.

<sup>13</sup> quoted from Bogel/Blühm, *Die deutschen Zeitungen des 17. Jahrhunderts*, Bd. 1, 14.

<sup>14</sup> see *Deutsches Wörterbuch von Jacob und Wilhelm Grimm* (reprint of the original edition of 1889). Bd. 13, München 1984, Sp. 1489/1490.

<sup>15</sup> *Deutsches Wörterbuch von Jacob und Wilhelm Grimm* (reprint of the original edition of 1936). Bd. 24, München 1984, Sp. 2041.

<sup>16</sup> quoted from Bogel/Blühm, *Die deutschen Zeitungen des 17. Jahrhunderts*, Bd. 2, 49. Strassbourg's *Relation* from 1609 already drew attention to this aspect ("trewlichst"); see as above 7.

<sup>17</sup> quoted from Walter Schöne (Hg.): *Die deutsche Zeitung des siebzehnten Jahrhunderts in Abbildungen*. 400 Faksimiledrucke. Leipzig 1940, Caption 266. See for the meaning of "menniglich" Bd. 12 des *Wörterbuchs von Jacob und Wilhelm Grimm* (reprint of the original edition of 1885). München 1984, Sp. 1591-1593.

<sup>18</sup> for an illustration of the first edition as well as detailed explanations see Schönhagen, *Unparteilichkeit im Journalismus*, 47.

<sup>19</sup> Martin Welke (Hg.): *Hollsteinischer Unpartheyischer Correspondent 1721-30, Hamburgischer Unpartheyischer Correspondent 1731-40*. (Microfiche-Index.) Hildesheim; New York 1977, III. 19. The principle of "audiatur et altera pars" was also represented by the *Augsburgische Ordinari Postzeitung*, see Hermann Hart: *Skizzen aus der Geschichte der "Postzeitung"*. In: *Postzeitung, Wochenschrift für Politik und Kultur*, Nr. 175, 250 Jg. München 4. 8. 1935, 6 (part 1).

<sup>20</sup> Elger Blühm: *Fragen zum Thema Zeitung und Gesellschaft im 17. Jahrhundert*. In: ders. (Hg.): *Presse und Geschichte. Beiträge zur historischen Kommunikationsforschung*. München 1977, 54-70, hier 61.

<sup>21</sup> see Stieler, *Zeitung Lust und Nutz*, 27 ff. as well as Karl Kurth (Hg.): *Die ältesten Schriften für und wider die Zeitung*. Brunn et al. 1944. For a discussion of these papers in the context see Berns, "Parteilichkeit" und *Zeitungswesen*, as well as Schönhagen, *Unparteilichkeit im Journalismus*, 39 ff.

<sup>22</sup> see Thomas Schröder: *Die ersten Zeitungen. Textgestaltung*

und *Nachrichtenauswahl*. Tübingen 1995. Schröder shows up that there was little partisanship where conflict reporting was concerned. Certain imbalances were due to lack of research or the circumstances. (see Schröder, *Die ersten Zeitungen*, 334 as well as 165 ff, 310 ff.)

<sup>23</sup> see Brigitte Tolkemitts' research to the above mentioned *Hamburgischer Correspondent* (*Der Hamburgische Correspondent. Zur öffentlichen Verbreitung der Aufklärung in Deutschland*. Tübingen 1995). There are several studies to support this theory which for lack of space are not quoted here, but are quoted in Schönhagen's references in *Unparteilichkeit im Journalismus*, 18 ff.

<sup>24</sup> see Schönhagen, *Unparteilichkeit im Journalismus*, 36 ff.

<sup>25</sup> These are found in newspaper originals, but also in anniversary editions which contained facsimiles, quotations, etc. (the institute in Munich has a collection of such editions with more than 1,500 titles), as well as in collections of front pages such as Bogel/Blühm, *Die deutschen Zeitungen des 17. Jahrhunderts*, and in relevant literature on the history of the press, e.g. in monographs like the one mentioned earlier by Brigitte Tolkemitts (*Der Hamburgische Correspondent*).

- "Audiatur et altera pars": the objective of this principle was to provide universal news whereby all the knowledge and conscious experience prevailing in societies (also local ones), as well as all the different points of view and opinions were given equal consideration throughout. Today this principle is often referred to as pluralism, a term which does not do full justice to the universality of news reporting. It should be noted that this principle did not apply to individual newspaper articles but to news coverage as a whole.<sup>26</sup> It also did not include journalists' own opinions as expressed in commentaries and the like.
- Separation of news and (journalistic) commentary (editorial): this was considered a sign of neutrality on the part of the news supplier and a guarantee for "impartial" news representation. Newspapers of the 17th and 18th centuries in particular, for the most part did without commentaries,<sup>27</sup> which was partly due to the strict censorship regulations valid at the time. Those commentaries which did appear were clearly separated from the actual news and were marked accordingly.
- Transparency of primary sources, i.e. the originators of reports or statements: this principle had two objectives in mind. One was to maintain the reliability of sources and the other was to provide maximum orientation for readers. Sound judgment of reports and statements was almost impossible without knowing the originators and their interests, motivation, etc. (This was not true for experts who had other, relevant criteria to rely on).<sup>28</sup> Besides, there was a strong link between transparency of sources and the principle below, as in those days it was said that news reporters were not responsible for the contents, or rather the truth or correctness of news, but for relating these news cor-

rectly ("relata refero"). In stating the origin of a piece of news the reporter automatically conferred responsibility for the contents to the originator. The reporter's responsibility for correct reproduction was covered by the following principle:

- Exact or "faithful" reporting:<sup>29</sup> news, even when condensed and adapted, were to be reported in an "unadulterated" way, i.e. honestly and faithfully, in accordance with their original meaning.<sup>30</sup> This applied to all news regardless of their origin (equal treatment in principle). In addition coverage was to be to the point: "without passion" or "affect".

The above rules went hand in hand with a very specific conception journalists had of themselves which in actual fact constituted the basis or prerequisite for all of these rules: newspapermen saw themselves a neutral reporters who pursued their profession "without passion", in other words, without taking sides with any one party. The *Frankfurter Kayserl. Oberpostamtszeitung*, in its 13<sup>th</sup> edition of 1781 wrote:

*Journalists have to be cosmopolitans, they must not be friends or foes of any nation, must examine the source of all news and without reserve must relate to their readers the naked and bare truth.*<sup>31</sup>

The editors of the *Göppinger Wochenblatt*, in one of their issues of 1850, quite explicitly described the functions of a neutral and impartial reporting:

*It is not a party paper and therefore will continue to portray the views of different parties as before, and will protect itself from any restrictive influences. Even at the risk of being reproached for confusing matters it will not deviate from this position because it believes that a local paper, if it*

"factual reproduction of a message and one that conveyed the general sense of the message" (Jan Assmann: *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis, Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen*. München 1990).

<sup>30</sup> Interestingly, the current code of the German press council also mentions reproduction of news, information and documents according to the sense of their message, see <http://www.presserat.de> [read on 22. 10. 2001].

<sup>31</sup> quoted from Holger Böning: *Zeitung, Zeitschrift, Intelligenzblatt. Die Entwicklung der periodischen Presse im Zeitalter der Aufklärung*. In: Klaus Beyer/Martin Dallmeier (Hg.): *Als die Post noch Zeitung machte. Eine Pressegeschichte*. Gießen 1994, 93-103, hier 96.

*wants to serve the freedom of press in any way at all, can bring enlightenment to the people by showing them different views and deductions therefrom and by leaving it to the people to decide upon their correctness.*<sup>32</sup>

The editor of the *Chemnitzer Bote*, in 1848, was even more to the point in saying that:

*The editor, like the chairman of a major assembly of different parties, is to give everyone the right to speak, so long as they do not transgress the basic boundaries of moderation.*<sup>33</sup>

### Background and Motive

It is often assumed that impartial or objective journalism (only) came to fruition under the influence of democracy;<sup>34</sup> in reality, however, that principle was formed in the days of absolutism. What in effect was it that caused or motivated this concept of journalism? Was it simply a reaction to strict censorship? This theory is supported by several facts, one being the *bayerische Pressmandat* of September 6, 1799, during the reign of Maximilian IV. Joseph, which laid down that "the facts were to be reported in as simple a way as possible, without adding personal judgement, but stating all references."<sup>35</sup> Yet, on closer inspection, the influence of censorship seems rather ambivalent. There are several indications that the principle of impartiality was practised even where censorship was "mild",<sup>36</sup> but also that it went through despite the opposition of censorship.<sup>37</sup> Hans Wagner quotes a number of examples to demonstrate that

*in some instances censorship might have helped along a neutral, distanced and diplomatically cautious style of reporting; in essence though it causes opportunism rather than impartiality. Above all, though, censorship calls for deleting and being silent on certain facts, thereby causing the loss of information. In doing so it runs counter to the objective to be achieved by the working principle of impartiality which is to provide readers with comprehensive information.*<sup>38</sup>

The motive clearly lies elsewhere. Margot Lindemann for one, in pointing to the *Augsburger Ordinari-Zeitung*, supports her theory that it was "primarily economic considerations" which led to impartiality in reporting.<sup>39</sup> For any paper to reach a wide readership it was advisable to take into consideration the most diverse communication and orientation needs and interests (also in view of the highly fragmented realm and the heterogeneity of parties this caused<sup>40</sup>). Opportunist partisanship as favoured by the authorities would not have been interesting from an economic point of view.

There are numerous quite explicit indications to support the theory of economic motivation,<sup>41</sup> which in many instances had to do with the fact that most newspaper editors were at the same time printers seeking a supplementary income. Especially local and regional papers with their limited range had to (and to this day have to) make every effort to reach as wide a readership as possible and to cover their terrain as best they could. No doubt this is one of the reasons why these papers have stuck to impartiality longer than elsewhere, despite the increasing politicisation of society.

<sup>32</sup> quoted from Oskar Bechtle: *Was sind und was bedeuten 100 Jahre Göppinger Zeitung?* In: *Jubiläumsausgabe 100 Jahre Göppinger Zeitung* (16. 5. 1927), 1 f. and 7, here 2.

<sup>33</sup> quoted from a caption in the *Jubiläumsausgabe 75 Jahre Chemnitzer Tagblatt* (1. 7. 1923), 25.

<sup>34</sup> see f.e. Wolfgang R. Langenbacher: *Kommunikation als Beruf. Ansätze kommunikationswissenschaftlicher Berufsforschung*. Habil.-Schrift maschinenschr. München 1973, 51.

<sup>35</sup> Wilhelm Bauer: *Die öffentliche Meinung und ihre geschichtlichen Grundlagen*. Tübingen 1914, 276 f.

<sup>36</sup> z.B. beim erwähnten *Hamburgischen Correspondenten*, see. Welke, *Hollsteinischer Unparteyischer Correspondent* 1721-30, III.

<sup>37</sup> see. Schönhausen, *Unparteilichkeit im Journalismus*, 87 f., 191, 202 f., 219.

<sup>38</sup> Wagner, *Journalismus I: Auftrag*, 107.

<sup>39</sup> Margot Lindemann: *Deutsche Presse bis 1815. Geschichte der deutschen Presse. Teil I.* (reprint of the original edition of 1969) Berlin 1988, 151.

<sup>40</sup> see Tolkemitt, *Der Hamburgische Correspondent*, 45 f. (as well as Berns, *„Parteilichkeit“ und Zeitungswesen*).

<sup>41</sup> see f.e. Carsten Prange: *Die Zeitungen und Zeitschriften des 17. Jahrhunderts in Hamburg und Altona. Ein Beitrag zur publizistischen Frühaufklärung*. Hamburg 1978, 148; Martin Welke: *Die Geschichte der Zeitung in den ersten Anfängen ihres Bestehens. Kritische Bemerkungen zu Margot Lindemanns „Deutsche Presse bis 1815“*. In: *Daphnis. Zeitschrift für Mittlere Deutsche Literatur*, Bd. 3, 1974, 92-106, here 97; Hart, *Skizzen aus der Geschichte der Postzeitung*, 6; Schönhausen, *Unparteilichkeit im Journalismus*, bes. 126 ff., 285 ff.

<sup>26</sup> It is quite evident that comprehensive reporting can only take place periodically as the different points of view and opinions are developed in reaction to each other.

<sup>27</sup> There was a functional separation of reporting papers on the one hand and reasoning leaflets on the other hand (see Schönhausen, *Unparteilichkeit im Journalismus*, 18 f.), partly because printers and editors of single prints who were often mobile were better able to remain anonymous and flee the country across one of the many borders if they had to.

<sup>28</sup> see Hans Wagner: *Journalismus I: Auftrag. Gesammelte Beiträge zur Journalistentheorie*. Erlangen 1995, 199 ff.

<sup>29</sup> This claim corresponds to the ancient "messenger formula" which in the ancient orient had called for the

## On the Implementation of Rules of Conduct

A detailed analysis of local papers of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries shows that the individual rules of conduct<sup>42</sup> implied by the principle of impartiality were essential to editorial programmes and daily newspaper life.<sup>43</sup> Particular emphasis was placed on the principle of universal reporting, as a consequence of which papers were turned into forums of local communication where lively and often controversial discussions were held among citizens on all issues concerning them.<sup>44</sup> People even went so far as to consider these discussions their civil right. As a rule, editors' commentaries – mostly background information or explanatory notes on the practice of reporting rather than expressions of their own opinion – were clearly separated from the actual reporting and marked accordingly.

At the same time editors were keen to reveal the origins of their news yet were restricted in doing so by the principle of anonymity which was still valid for all journalistic activities in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This also had to do with the protection of sources. This is why contributions from outside frequently only bore the initials, indications of profession or function, or other indirect signatures of their authors. However, as the local situation was clearly visible at a glance, readers were able to get a rough idea of what sources had been used. It is also quite interesting to note that some papers provided information on the "accessory circumstances" of individual news,<sup>45</sup> i.e. the situation statements arose from, the motivation and

interests behind them, etc. as these were in many cases considered more important for the assessment of information and the formation of opinions than the factual information itself.<sup>46</sup> Uncertain sources were expressly marked as such. The claim for exact and unadulterated news reporting was translated into a set of individual rules on reporting which were published in the papers, often in combination with requests for citizens' contributions. Some rules concerned the length and diffuseness of contributions, others were set up to avoid insult and abuse, etc. and all of them assured equal opportunities for everyone to access the paper as a forum. Reporting standards were explained and justified regularly on the basis of individual cases.<sup>47</sup>

A survey of local papers also proved that the motives for impartial reporting were primarily of a pragmatic nature. Any idealistic motives there might have been behind the concept, as in the case of the Dortmund paper *Westfälischer Anzeiger* by Arnold Mallinckrodt, were counterproductive, if anything. Mallinckrodt's enlightening intentions proved a significant hindrance to impartiality: "Unenlightened" ideas were either not published at all or were heavily commented and in some cases even put to the pillory of journalism. In one particular instance a reader had sent in a contribution on miracle healers. The editors in their commentary immediately demanded the names of those who sought help from such "bunglers" so that they could publish them, because "publicity punishes slowly but surely."<sup>48</sup>

## 3. Impartiality in 18<sup>th</sup> Century American Journalism

As briefly mentioned above there are indications that a similar concept of journalist impartiality existed in early American colonial papers of the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>49</sup> It is true that these papers, which in 1704 postmasters had been granted the official permission of English governors to publish, were awarded little attention in literature and were dismissed as "empty news registers."<sup>50</sup> However, as Hazel Dicken-Garcia points out they used the same journalistic standards as Elizabeth Mallett's *Daily Courant*, the first "successful daily newspaper" in England. The latter, in her first edition of March 11, 1702, professed almost the same principles as those typical for German-language papers with the exception of universal reporting.<sup>51</sup> That aspect, however, was quickly added by her successor the following month. He assured readers that reports would be published as he received them

*without inclining either to one side or the other: And this will be found to do, by representing the same Actions, according to the different Accounts which both Sides give of them [.....].*<sup>52</sup>

Just as the editors of German-language papers before him Thomas Fleet, editor of the Boston *Weekly Rehearsal* professed impartiality and universal reporting by urging readers to contribute and by publishing rules for such contributions.<sup>53</sup>

Stephen Botein's comments on the printing tradition in early colonialism provide useful information in this context. He claims that for economic reasons printing too was characterized by the principle of impartiality.

*Usually unable to rely for a living on the favor of one group among his neighbours, included those who wielded political power, a colonial printer by custom labored to serve diverse interests in his community. Unlike London, where large profits were sometimes to be had by making partisan commitments to one well-financed faction or another, colonial America was a place for printers to be studiously impartial.*

This attitude was referred to as freedom of press, i.e. "the 'liberty of the press'. [...] A press was 'free' in this formulation, only if it was 'open to all parties'".<sup>54</sup>

Printers subsequently applied this same principle to the papers they published – and for the same reasons too. They feared that they would otherwise lose potential subscribers and printing orders.<sup>55</sup> As in the German tradition of impartiality editors of relevant American colonial papers also had a particular conception of themselves. Up until the revolution they saw themselves as "passive, detached observers, neutrally relaying information and opinion to others".<sup>56</sup> It was only with the revolution that printers and newspaper editors began to take sides with different parties, many of them involuntarily so, as Botein reports.<sup>57</sup> Following this stage of "partisan

<sup>42</sup> Examining historical material for faithful reporting is quite difficult as original statements made by individuals are not available for comparison with the reports printed in papers and the individuals cannot be interviewed as to their statements. Consequently it is only possible to draw indirect conclusions. (see Schönhagen, *Unparteilichkeit im Journalismus*, 82).

<sup>43</sup> As mentioned above secondary sources were referred to to begin with, particularly with a view to their programmatic aspect. In all, 1,500 titles were examined. In a further step implementation was asserted with original material (three titles with more than 1,500 editions between the late 18<sup>th</sup> and mid 19<sup>th</sup> centuries). For procedures and results see also Schönhagen, *Unparteilichkeit im Journalismus*.

<sup>44</sup> One exception was one of the papers examined as an example for original material, which for some time (due to stiff censorship and its wide range of distribution) only pursued event-oriented reporting (announcing festivities, reporting on accidents, fires, etc.) to which the principle of universal reporting did not apply, see also Schönhagen, *Unparteilichkeit im Journalismus*, 218 ff.

<sup>45</sup> Arnold Mallinckrodt, the editor of the *Westfälischer Anzeiger* in Dortmund used the term to refer to information "which had a bearing on the proper judgement of a matter" (in a contribution on "Publicität" of April 14, 1801, 3; see also, Schönhagen, *Unparteilichkeit im Journalismus*, 184).

<sup>46</sup> see Wagner, *Journalismus I: Auftrag*, 199 ff. He calls these accessory circumstances "informations about the Information" or so to say "Beglaubigungswissen".

<sup>47</sup> In such cases reasons were provided why certain contributions had not been printed, e.g. because they had seemed too anonymous to the editors. In one case an editor stated that he had been unable to print an article for lack of style, asking not to be condemned as being partisan because of his decision. (quotation from *Jubiläumsausgabe: 140 Jahre Bergisch-Märkische Zeitung*, Elberfeld 1.12.1929), for similar reporting rules and their publication see also Schönhagen: *Die Zeitung der Leser. Die Idee der Leserbeteiligung in der Heimatzeitung des 19. Jahrhunderts*. München; Mühlheim 1993, 65 ff.

<sup>48</sup> *Westfälischer Anzeiger* Nr. 26, 28. 9. 1798, Sp. 408.

<sup>49</sup> As mentioned earlier this has hardly been looked into, not even by relevant studies such as the one by Mindich, *Just the facts*, 11 ff. While he does point out that standards such as "fairness, detachment, nonpartisanship, and balance" had been discussed prior to 1830 and also refers to several newspapers of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, yet he does so only to postulate without further examination that prior to 1830 these standards had not been implemented.

<sup>50</sup> Emil Dovifat: *Der amerikanische Journalismus*. Reprint of the original edition of 1927 with an introduction of Stephan Ruß-Mohl und Bernd Sösemann. Stephan Ruß-Mohl (Hg.). Berlin 1990, 14. See George Henry Payne: *History of Journalism in the United States*. New York 1920, 26; Jörg Requate: *Journalismus als Beruf. Entstehung und Entwicklung des Journalistenberufs im 19. Jahrhundert. Deutschland im internationalen Vergleich*. Göttingen 1995, 35.

<sup>51</sup> see Hazel Dicken-Garcia: *Journalistic standards in nineteenth-century America*. Madison/Wisconsin; London 1989, 11 ff.

<sup>52</sup> quoted from Willard Grosvenor Bleyer: *Main currents in the history of american journalism*. Boston et al. 1927, 18.

<sup>53</sup> quoted from Marcus A. McCorison: *Foreword*. In: Bernard Bailyn/John B. Hench (Eds.): *The press and the american revolution*. Worcester/Mass. 1980, 1-10, here 2. For more examples and references to the concept of "impartiality" see Schönhagen, *Unparteilichkeit im Journalismus*, 58 ff.

<sup>54</sup> Stephen Botein: *Printers and the american revolution*. In: Bernard Bailyn/John B. Hench (Eds.): *The press and the american revolution*. Worcester/Mass. 1980, 19.

<sup>55</sup> see Botein: *Printers and the american revolution*, 20-22.

<sup>56</sup> William F. Steirer: *Riding "everyman's hobby horse": Journalists in Philadelphia, 1764-1794*. In: Donovan H. Bond/W. Reynolds McLeod (Eds.): *Newsletters to newspapers: eighteenth-century journalism*. Papers presented at a bicentennial symposium at West Virginia University 1976. Morgantown/West Virginia 1977, 263-275, here 263.

<sup>57</sup> Neutral printers were often exposed to violent attacks. Ultimately, partisanship seemed inevitable, and in many cases also paid off, considering the changes in politics and society. (see Botein, *Printers and the american revolution*, 21 ff., 32 ff.).

journalism",<sup>58</sup> so-called "penny press"<sup>59</sup> papers appeared which took up impartial or objective journalism once more, again for economic reasons.<sup>60</sup>

#### 4. Conclusions and Theoretical Implications

Both in Germany and in America there is proof of a tradition of impartial journalism which can be traced back to the beginnings of (periodical) newspapers and which is therefore substantially older than commonly assumed. The principle of impartiality is closely linked to the way journalists see themselves as neutral reporters or "detached observers", and is put into practical terms by a few central rules of conduct. It is primarily for economic and pragmatic motives that papers have been striving to meet the most diverse interests and demands for information, communication and orientation on the readers' side. The principle of impartiality is really a principle of pragmatic journalism.<sup>61</sup>

The concept of impartiality is very practically oriented which is why it makes all the more sense to take up this journalistic tradition once more, particularly in view of the issues and problems of journalism today. At the same time it provides one possible solution for the theoretical discus-

sion on journalist objectivity: Provided the concept of impartiality as applied in practice is taken seriously, the claim for journalistic objectivity is no longer a claim for objective portrayal or realization of the truth, which in view of constructivist ideas is quite impossible anyway, but rather a claim for impartial reporting of the different points of view, the different interpretations of reality, and the different truths apparent in society. Journalist objectivity therefore is not a problem that needs to be solved by theories of cognition but instead it is a sign of quality of editorial reporting. According to Luhmann journalism has set itself the task of reporting so that society can observe itself.<sup>62</sup> Otfried Jarren is even more to the point in using the term "discourses of self-communication",<sup>63</sup> which mass media are there to relay. It is by this act of relaying or reporting that society is enabled to communicate on itself and find a common definition for social reality, which again is only possible through communication. Impartiality ensures that all parties and interests are given the chance to participate and all the different points of view and the different truths are granted access to the discourse arranged by the mass media<sup>64</sup>. In doing so it guarantees maximum orientation and information for everyone.

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<sup>58</sup> Frank Luther Mott: *American journalism. A history of newspapers in the United States through 250 years, 1690 to 1940*. New York 1942, 167. See Jeffrey Rutenbeck: *Toward a history of the ideologies of partisanship and independence in American journalism*. In: *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 2/1991, 126-139, here 129 ff.

<sup>59</sup> Requate, *Journalismus als Beruf*, 36.

<sup>60</sup> The further development which also brought about the implementation of the principle of "objective reporting" will not be discussed in any detail here, as it is given sufficient consideration in the relevant literature quoted above, see also, amongst others: Schudson, *Origins of the idea of objectivity*, Mindich, *Just the facts*, as well as Dan Schiller: *An historical approach to objectivity and professionalism in American news reporting*. In: *Journal of Communication* 1/1979, 46-57. for an overview see Schönhagen, *Unparteilichkeit im Journalismus*, 66 ff.

<sup>61</sup> It has to be said that economic motives were not guarantee for a journalist's impartiality or that impartiality was a

logical consequence of such motives. The historical concept, as mentioned above, is based on a certain market strategy as well as on journalists' own way of seeing themselves.

<sup>62</sup> see Niklas Luhmann: *Die Realität der Massenmedien*. Opladen 1996, 173.

<sup>63</sup> Otfried Jarren: *Gesellschaftliche Integration durch Medien? Zur Begründung normativer Anforderungen an die Medien*. In: *Medien & Kommunikationswissenschaft* 1/2000, 22-41, here f.e. 23.

<sup>64</sup> This does not necessarily mean that everyone has to get a word in but that all the different points of view are related, which are usually presented by collectives or representatives. All this is made possible by communicative representation (see Wagner: *Journalismus I: Auftrag*, 240 ff.). Discourses are not necessarily rational ones as with Habermas. However, mutual recognition and relations between individual positions are a necessary prerequisite for discourses of self-communication.

## Official Reporting

### On the History of Governmental Policies for News Agencies in Austria<sup>1</sup>

Wolfgang Pensold\*

#### The first state-owned news agency

The institutional beginnings of government-inspired news agencies on Austrian territory can be traced back to the days of Chancellor Klemens Lothar Metternich. Metternich tried to secure the reactionary Central European order established after the Vienna Congress of 1814/15 by counteracting the attempts at liberalisation which were appearing in many newspapers. A petition by the title "die Presse" presented to Metternich, which by the way had not date and was not signed, proposed the establishment of a news agency that would provide newspapers with pro-government news. The author of the petition spoke at great length about the government measures against the liberal press in England and France and eventually came to the conclusion that despite stiff penalties and raging corruption neither of these countries had been able to rein in the newspapers. He went on to say that the French ministry of the interior had set up a newspaper article factory by the name of *Bureau de l'esprit public* which was directly subordinate to the minister of the interior. Journalists and editors were paid by the month to compose leading articles which were "disguised as semi-official" and distributed to the daily papers in the different departments of the country on a daily basis. The government granted royalties, positions and distinctions, "all kinds of privileges and gifts" to bring the newspapermen to heel. On top of that, Paris papers of all colours as well as major provincial papers had at their disposal a "lithographic translation and news agency" located at the foreign ministry which supplied all foreign news quickly and at favourable rates. All the news were "modified or changed, cut to size or condensed,

held back completely or in part" before they reached the public, "depending on the requirements of the day."<sup>2</sup>

This much on the petition which argued in favour of a new political instrument to control the press. It did not seem to convince Metternich, however, as no such project materialized in Vienna at that time. The government made do with paying bribes and suppressing the papers with stiff censorship as before.

In 1848, the revolution in Vienna broke out against Metternich and his police state. Above all the revolutionists demanded freedom of press – civil society was to have its own public forum so it could speak up on relevant political matters. The revolution brought forth a liberal press act, which allowed commentators of all colours to address the readership openly and directly. But the revolution was crushed by the emperor's army and the press spring was brought to an end. The rule of emperor Franz Joseph II, only 19 years old, marked the beginning of a neo-absolutist era of suppression.

It was against this background that the *Österreichische Correspondenz* (Austrian press agency) came into being as a mouthpiece for the government. Joseph Tuvora, founder of the agency and one of the revolutionaries who during the days of the revolution had participated in the "journalists coup" was evidently afraid that the reinstated powers-that-be would put him on trial for having proclaimed the republic. He offered his services to Alexander Bach, the minister of justice and the interior in office at the time. In a letter of August 1849 addressed to the minister he announced that he would presently "have the honour to present the idea of a lithographic news agency"<sup>3</sup> as previously suggested. In a further letter of Sep-

\* translated by Mag. Verena Tomasik.

<sup>1</sup> The following article is an extract from the book *Die Macht der Nachricht. Die Geschichte der Nachrichtenagenturen in Österreich*, by Edith Dörfler and Wolfgang Pensold, which was initiated by Wolfgang Vysozil, head of *Austria Presse Agentur*, and published at Molden Verlag in November 2001. The book is based on a two year research project financed by *Austria Presse Agentur*.

<sup>2</sup> quoted from Frithjof Kammerer: *Die Pressepolitik*

*Metternichs. Versuch einer Gesamtdarstellung*. Diss. Wien 1958, 272 ff.

<sup>3</sup> Brief von Tuvora an Bach, 28. August 1849; zit. n. Wilhelm Liebisch: *Das Entstehen der ersten amtlichen Nachrichtenstelle in Österreich. Von der Gründung der Österreichischen Correspondenz (1849) bis zur Überweisung des k.k. Telegraphen Correspondenz-Bureaus an das Ministerrats-Präsidium*. Diss. Wien 1954, 18.



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